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ABSTRACT

To compete for dwindling numbers of traditional college-aged students and to attract non-traditional clientele, community colleges are becoming increasingly involved in marketing. Commitment to a total marketing concept requires institutional research to identify the college's mission, potential students, and the competition. Those in charge of recruitment should be careful to avoid sales and promotional approaches that may increase enrollments, but increase dropout rates as well. Cost-effective marketing suggestions include the following: (1) appoint a marketing officer; (2) use already available research conducted by newspapers, local planning departments, and state and federal agencies; (3) as marketing officer, experience the admissions process by registering for a course, but also be aware of the registration staff; (4) as a teacher, show concern for students who are missing classes or who drop a course; (5) use specialized marketing approaches with different target groups; (6) adapt athletics departments' recruitment techniques to academic disciplines; (7) make current students aware of other classes of interest; (8) consider advertising in terms of results and costs; (9) learn from industrial training programs; (10) maintain, but re-evaluate class schedules; (11) repackage low demand courses; and (12) remind students of how close they are to a degree. (JP)

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Creative Marketing For The 80's

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WHERE ARE WE IN THE MARKETING PROCESS

The more material I read in preparation for this discussion, the more intrigued I became with the actual level of achievement community colleges had reached in their marketing. There is a continuum in the marketing process which starts at "zero" with no marketing at all and ends with that elusive "ten" we have been hearing so much about -- a total marketing concept. Let me tell you about the three stages of marketing as described by Dennis Johnson in his article, Marketing is Not a Dirty Word.

STAGE I IS THE PRODUCT STATE

A good school, plenty of students who feel that it is the right school for them. There is no professional admissions officer, just a registrar or dean of admissions. Plain catalogs are mailed. There is little or no travel to high schools-no campus visitation program.

STAGE II IS THE SALES STAGE

This is the discovery, with a touch of panic, that "we need more students, we better knock on doors." An admissions officer is appointed and given a set of car keys and a road map. Published materials are slicked up, without changing their content. Large mailings are made, usually poorly targeted. Many schools are visited, not very cost effectively. A hard sell approach is launched with massive amounts of radio, television and newspaper advertising. It is here that the foundation for attrition problems is laid. If discovery does not match promise in an institution, students will vote with their feet.

JC 800 211

RETENTION

Whether or not we realize it, retention and marketing are part and parcel of the same program. In private industry they call it repeat business. I think any business has a very significant problem when as much as fifty per cent of its customers drop out in the first few weeks. There needs to be a tremendous amount of work done in this area to determine why our students leave before the end of the semester.

STAGE III IS PURE MARKETING

There is an attempt to understand the college's strengths and weaknesses, to decide what it is and what it can feasibly become. This analysis indicates the kinds of students to be sought and identifies the competition. Courses and programs can now be planned to first reach and then satisfy the institution's natural clientele.

My own opinion is that community colleges -- indeed, postsecondary education in general -- lie someplace beyond stage II and are headed for Stage III. We are about an eight on that ten point scale.

So what is marketing?

Dennis Johnson, the nation's foremost college marketing expert says the total marketing concept is based on institutional analysis. It involves research, examination of the mission of the college, market testing, where and how to meet student needs. It integrates trustees, administration, faculty and staff efforts into a cohesive team approach.

NEW TOOLS FOR THE CREATIVE MANAGER

The total plan focuses on what can be done to improve the learning, teaching, serving commitment of the institution. It accepts the notion that if larger numbers of students are better served and instruction provides quality classroom experiences, students are more likely to return or remain on campus.

Unfortunately, those in charge of student recruitment have often tried to alter traditional techniques by taking the sales and promotion approach rather than

the marketing approach. Money and effort went into new brochures without accurate market information or definitive research. We are revolving doors for students in search of whatever they are looking for.

COST SAVING IDEAS

FIRST THINGS FIRST

Appoint someone on the administrative team to take charge of the marketing program on your campus and give it a high priority. If you get off to a cold start, bring in one of the marketing professionals.

It would be worth it to get started if you are having trouble. Get a copy of Kotler's book and dig in.

LOOKING FOR RESEARCH

--Demographic studies may be available through local newspapers, and city or county urban planning departments. Check those environmental impact reports.

--Don't overlook some of those state and federal reports that are required of colleges for financial aid and veterans. They will at least get you started.

--You might consider publishing a questionnaire in the class schedule or take a questionnaire to selected classes.

IDENTIFYING PUBLICS

The future for community colleges will not lie with traditional 18-year old high school seniors. They are a relatively easy to contact group in that they are located at a small number of in-district high schools. The real challenge will be that of developing the sophistication not only to reach, but impact the non-traditional, unreached and not-yet-served student.

ADMISSIONS

As a top adminstrator, go sign up for a course at your own college to see how the process works for a student. First hand experience.

--How many times does your college ask a student to come to the campus to register for a class?

--How many steps are in the registration process?

--Do students have to wander all over campus to sign forms?

--Are there steps in the process that turn students off?

--Is the admission application simple or complex?

By the same token, mark you calendar to sit in the middle of the next registration at your campus and see what kinds of problems your staff is having. Just sit, and watch and listen. You may be able to spot some easy changes or find that everything is going well.

SHOW MORE CARING

--Instructors should be encouraged to call each student when they miss a class or two.

--When a class is dropped, an instructor or counselor should make another phone call.

--We ought to find out directly why students drop out of school. Have them fill out a questionnaire when they check out.

--The answers to these profiles should be used to plan programs or make changes in current programs to foster retention.

SEMESTERS TOO LONG

--I must tell you right now, that I am a real advocate of shorter semesters. As the semester wears on, students tend to get burned out. Why not shorten the semester and offer two courses in place of one. A modular schedule.

--Drop in and drop out courses.

SHOTGUN VS. RIFLE

--I think we are still using the shotgun when we should be using a rifle. A single high cost brochure may be attractive, but it can be too general to say much.

--Target groups respond differently. Senior citizens don't respond the same way that 18-year-olds do.

--Don't abandon the general descriptive brochures entirely, but before you

go into another printing, sit down with a sampling of people in the target group you are trying to reach and get their reactions. You will learn a lot about what you have been doing and what you should be doing.

ATHLETICS AND COACHES

You might pay close attention to the people in your athletic department. They are masters of recruitment. When they spot a quarterback or a good pitcher at a local high school, they make a real effort to bring that kind to the team.

Why not do the same thing at the high school level with the sciences? Start in the lower grades and work up. Try to recruit the young student before they make the decision to attend the university.

Sit down with your coaching staff and learn their routine.

CAMPUS TARGET GROUPS

--We should not overlook our own classrooms for recruitment. Those currently enrolled students can be a good pool from which to recruit.

--Students in medieval English classes could be good candidates for a series of short courses in other areas like drama, art and music. There is always room for an extra unit here and there.

--Develop a weekly schedule of new courses opening up. Make it separate from other publications. Make it a regular publication. Use it on campus and off campus as well.

MONEY WELL SPENT

A single $5,000 advertisement in the Los Angeles Times could bring a lot of criticism, but it could also be a very effective use of tax dollars.

If ten full time students respond, it will mean new money to your college district. It took the ADA of four students to pay for the ad and the ADA generated by the other six will be new money.

HOW DOES BUSINESS SPEND THEIR MARKETING DOLLARS

It is not uncommon for business to spend two to five per cent of their entire budget on advertising research, and promotion -- marketing.

That would be a rather large amount of money for colleges to spend. My point is that we very likely do not have any idea as to how much money is spent promoting college activities. There are probably little pockets of money riddled throughout your budgets. Get a handle on your expenses so you have an accurate account of what you are doing with your marketing dollars.

THE AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

They estimate that $40 billion dollars is being spent by American business in training and educating their employees. Postsecondary education has not reacted to a need that has a significant dollar value and certainly a social and corporate benefit. Business is doing much of the work that secondary and post-secondary education should be doing. The competition in the 1980's will not just be between institutions; it will be between traditional learning organizations and the corporate learning programs that are filling a void that postsecondary education left unfilled.

Carpenters, plumbers and electricians work with other established community programs.

THE CLASS SCHEDULES

It will be very tempting to cancel publication of the Fall class schedule if Jaws II is approved in June. It will be disastrous to the college that pulls in its horns and bites the bullet.

The class schedule is the major marketing vehicle of our colleges if it is not produced. It will take a long time to regain the momentum lost. There is a track record on this subject, and we must think back to the post Prop. 13 era and remember and re-think some of our actions.

RE-STUDY THOSE CLASS SCHEDULES

While we are on the subject of class schedules, let us take another hard look at them from the point of view of the student. Over the years, we have spent a lot of time developing content -- now let us ask these questions:

--Is the schedule readable?

--Does it answer all of the necessary questions about registration, student services and student policies?

--Do course titles tell the student the content of the course, and is there a course description? There should be one. VERY IMPORTANT!

--Keep this one thought in mind: The class schedule and the courses therein will have but one scan of the reader's eye. We have lost both the war and the battle if our readers are not aroused into reading further.

COURSE REPACKAGING

A botany course may not appeal to people who are really interested in plants, but the elements could be the same. Lagging enrollments could be reversed and students better served with a little re-tuning.

Foreign language courses are having some tough times these days, but with new direction and incorporating other fields could get a boost. How about foreign language training for international business people? You could also bring in some social science short courses to teach country customs.

45 UNITS AND COUNTING

One college in Texas has developed a computer process that prints out a list of courses thata student will need to take to complete a degree at the institution. It is printed right on the grade card of the just completed semester. In many cases it prods the student close to a degree to finish the program. There are also a lot of people who have been taking classes for a long time and don't know how close they are to a degree. They may not even be interested in a degree until they see how close they are.

WILL THERE BE ANYTHING ELSE??????

Just as corporations cannot long succeed when they develop an "Order Taking" mentality, the same can be true of the community college.

Community colleges must adopt some of the consumer selling responses practiced by private industry:

--The clerk at a super market will ask you if there is anything else as you pay for your groceries.

--Your waiter in a restaurant -- even McDonalds -- will ask you if you would like coffee or desert.

We should be doing the same thing.

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